

# Formative Evaluation Methods - PHSKC

## Formative evaluation is done to:

- Determine what your message should be
- Determine what your message should look like and sound like
- Determine what media venues you should use
- Determine whether you could use existing materials

## There are five methods of doing formative evaluation (you may use a combination):

### 1. Focus group discussion (with an existing group or a group created for this purpose)

A facilitator, preferably one who has characteristics in common with the target audience (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, shared experiences), conducts one to two hour group discussions with six to ten representatives of the target audience.

- Advantages: allows in-depth dynamic discussion; may elicit valuable information not contained in interview questions; allows for spontaneity.
- Disadvantages: can be time consuming with logistical challenges associated with pulling group together (less so if you use a free-standing group); it can be a challenge not to attract a biased group of participants (e.g., activists, those interested in the topic); findings cannot be projected to the population as a whole.

### 2. Qualitative individual interviews

Similar to focus group, but people are interviewed individually.

- Advantages: less prep time; easier to get one person at a time than to bring together a group; more random sample.
- Disadvantages: people often give shorter, less complete answers; more need to please the interviewer in a one-on-one situation; may be more labor-intensive than focus group; findings cannot be projected to the population as a whole.

### 3. Quantitative interviews

A large number of surveys asking specific questions about knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors are conducted by trained field interviewers.

- Advantages: Provides excellent, detailed information; can provide estimates representative of total population.
- Disadvantages: requires time, statistical expertise, and resources to conduct; need a mechanism for locating and reaching large numbers of your target audience and interviewing a randomized sample.

### 4. Gatekeeper interviews

Interview (or have focus groups with) people that interact regularly with your target group (e.g., teachers, outreach workers, clinicians, etc.)

- Advantages: gatekeepers' in-depth knowledge of target population may reveal insights you cannot elicit in focus groups; may help to guide your process and may warn you of potential pitfalls; it may also be crucial to understand their concerns at this stage because they may ultimately be an important deliverer of your material.
- Disadvantages: may give inaccurate or biased information about needs of target population.

### 5. Literature review/analysis of available health statistics

Collect all the information you can from other sources. Published articles on similar programs may offer invaluable assistance.

- Library databases
- Health statistics compiled by state and local health departments and the National Center for Health Statistics
- Focus groups by community based organizations and other Public Health programs

## **Evaluative questions to ask your target audience:**

Regardless of the method or methods you choose in doing formative evaluation, you want to create questions to ask that help you establish what your message should be, what your material should look and sound like, and what media venues would be most appropriate.

The following is a sample set of questions related to the development of materials for promotion of HIV preventive behaviors. Your specific questions will likely be somewhat different, but this example should give you some ideas on the types of questions that will be useful in your formative evaluation.

### **What should my message be?**

- Do members of the target audience understand and practice HIV preventive behaviors?
- What words do they use to describe risky behavior?
- What types of information might motivate them to change their risk behavior?
- What do they understand as the advantages of practicing safer sex?
- What are their attitudes toward people with HIV/AIDS?
- Do they think they may ever be infected with a STD or HIV/AIDS? Explain.
- What do their friends believe are acceptable sexual behaviors for STD and HIV prevention?

### **What should my message look like and sound like? Could I use existing materials?**

- Here you may also show a sample of materials on the same subject you are addressing and get feedback on these materials (see questions for pre-testing).
- What are some advertisements (on any topic) that you remember seeing or hearing? What did you like or not like about these ads?

### **What media venues would be best to use (e.g., TV, radio, brochures)?**

- Where and when do they like to get information? What is their favorite meeting place and time?
- Who are their favorite sources of information?
- When and where is it convenient to talk about HIV prevention?